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For new fire chief in East Norwich, technology is key



BY TONY POLICANO

East Norwich Fire Company has a new fire chief, Wayne Placella.

By **Laura Lane**

Wayne R. Placella moved to East Norwich when he was 12. When he turned 16 he started the East Norwich Fire Department Juniors. And that was because he wanted to be able to join the fire department as quickly as possible, which he did, becoming a firefighter at 17.

Now 36, Placella is the East Norwich Fire Company's new chief.

He said being a firefighter was a lifelong dream and now as the chief, he's achieved even more than he'd ever imagined.

"My friends' parents were firemen and I used to come to the fire department when I was a kid, which was when I decided I wanted to get involved," Placella explained. "I always had an interest in being a fireman — the sirens and the idea of helping people. I was always interested in that."

When Placella was in high school he knew of a junior firefighter program at the Oyster Bay Fire Department. If you are a junior, you learn all about firefighting as a teenager and after being a member for a few years can join the fire department.

"We wanted a juniors at the East Norwich Fire Department," he said. "In fact, we wanted to be firemen so badly we took it upon ourselves to start the program in East Norwich."

After a few years as a firefighter Placella decided he'd like to get more involved. "I started driving as an engineer and worked my way up the ranks," he said. "I worked hard to be where I am."

As the new chief, Placella plans to encourage technological improvements. He's working to get tablets for the chiefs' vehicles. "That way we can preplan for when we go to any property. Like we will know if there is an elderly lady on the second floor that can't get downstairs on her own, or if a fire hydrant is in front of a house. The tablets will tell us what is there beforehand," he explained.

Placella also hopes to get the tablets in the ambulances and the rest of the vehicles during his term, including all of the fire trucks.

"This will give us accountability of who is coming [to a call]," he said. "And we will know who is on the truck so everyone is also on the truck when we leave."

Placella is working with the local businesses to assist his fire department in preplanning. "Our top priority is always to keep the community safe," he said.

